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A PIONEER PARTY—A STUDY IN LOCAL GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY*

The story of the third-grade study of Chicago as it culminated in the "pioneer party" for the parents is given here with the thought that the problem of local history and geography is universal. It will be noted that the selection of units of study was the plan adopted, and that the point of contact was found in the present needs and comforts of the child. From this point of contact, the children became much interested in the study of the food and water supplies of Chicago; and this interest opened the way for many kinds of activity—for invention, for experiment, for trips to points of interest in local history, geography, and industry, and for acquaintance with numerous stories and traditions connected with pioneer life. This was done with the belief that a chronological order means little or nothing to the third-grade child. True, he is passing from the fairy-tale age, but so slowly that he is still eager for the "Once upon a time," rather than, "One hundred years ago," for the reason that with his short experience he is unable as yet to form a judgment of the events that might happen in so vast a period as a century.

Such a study is even more feasible in smaller communities than in the complex situation of Chicago. For the teacher the problem of selection is smaller; for the child the unit of study is less complex, and the material is at hand in tradition and story. So many points of contact are available in such a study that, yearly, different phases of the work could be taken, as opposed to the stereotyped course of study in local history and geography, where each year the teacher must teach a certain group of facts regardless of the interests of the children, which may vary widely from year to year.

At the beginning of the third-grade work after listing many of the foods used by the families represented, it became evident that to many children the source of supply went no further than the automobile-truck that daily delivered food supplies to the home. With children of wider experience this supply came from a grocery or food supply house; but from where the grocery received its provisions be-

*This report has been prepared by Miss Josephine F. Leach, Director of the State Normal School, Toledo, Ohio, who until recently was a member of the faculty of the Francis W. Parker School.

came a problem. Some one volunteered the information that his father often went to the wholesale market for fruit, and it soon became evident that there were great establishments that supplied the local grocers all over the city with their provisions.

But even these great storehouses must have a source of supply, and with this problem in mind a visit was made to Steele-Wedeles' Wholesale Food House. Where do Steele-Wedeles get the food supplies that they sell to grocers? With pencil and paper in hand the children solved the problem to their own satisfaction, by listing the names of localities that they found printed on the hundreds of boxes, as they passed up and down the long aisles, hedged in by crates of foodstuffs from all over the world.

Note that the problem is said to have been solved to the children's satisfaction, not necessarily to the teacher's. This does not mean that the work was without direction. Each child was allowed to do his best alone, and when he had gained the information he wished, it was accepted by the teacher, even though imperfect in the form in which it was gathered.

Returning to the school after this visit the children listed these localities and found that the foods at the wholesale house readily grouped themselves into two divisions, those grown or made in the United States, and those that came from other countries. A more thorough grouping was then made, supplemented by pictures, cut and brought from home, from various cans and labels on packages, until a classification called "Domestic and Foreign Foods" was judged to be the best title for the division made.

While listing these localities and also in all the work that followed, the children themselves realized that they were hampered because they had to stop constantly to ask for the spelling of words that were needed. The spelling for these days was well motivated, for the children made the spelling-lists when the teacher put the question, "What words are needed before we can write an account of our trip?"

The children had an awakening during this grouping of foods. Many of them had hitherto accepted and eaten food with no thought of the great number of people who daily ministered to their needs. One child was especially impressed with the currant-cleaning machine he had seen at the wholesale house; books were consulted to find what had been done to the currants before they made the long trip from

Greece to America; and the result of his investigation was set forth thus:

We saw many currants at the wholesale house. Most of these currants grew in Greece. They are planted in vineyards, in long rows so they can be picked easily. Men and women go down the long rows, picking the currants. After the currants are picked, they are dried in the sun. When dried they are packed into crates. They are then shipped to other countries. At the wholesale house they washed and cleaned the currants, then packed them into small boxes and sold them to grocery stores.

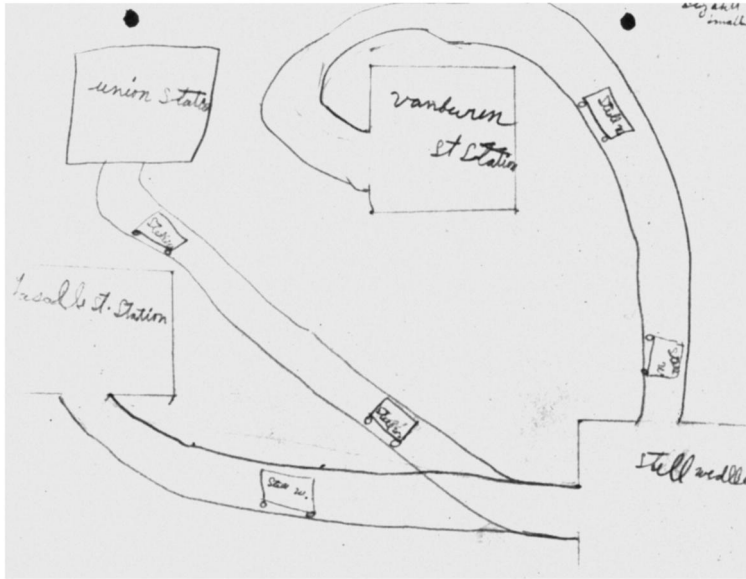
When the division of domestic and foreign foods had been made, the children made a further grouping of the foods they had seen on their visit, classifying them as meats, cereals, fruits, vegetables and beverages.

While at the wholesale house the visitors were taken in the elevator, far down below the surface of the street, and there given a glimpse of the freight switchyard. Here they saw many cars laden with food supplies. They were told by the guide that this switchyard led into the great freight subway of Chicago, that each car was loaded with food to be sent to some other city, and that each track led to a different railway freight station. Back again in the schoolroom the children began to search on a large map of Chicago for these various railway stations. When these were located, it was clear to the children that the great city of Chicago underground was a network of car tracks that enabled the city to receive and send away its foodstuffs.

In searching for these stations, a city map was found to be a complex affair. Once the stations were located, however, the children were asked to show "how Steele-Wedeles send their supplies to the railway freight stations of Chicago," and a simple plan (with no thought of scale) of one branch of the subway, with the switch-yard of the wholesale house as the point of departure, was the result. After consulting a city directory the children found that they had studied but one of many wholesale food houses in the city of Chicago, and that all were busy taking care of Chicago's food.

In all this study the children were gradually seeing that Chicago was very large and had to have many ways of taking care of its people. They had in a small way solved the problem of how Chicago takes care of its food question. In what other ways must a city care for its people?

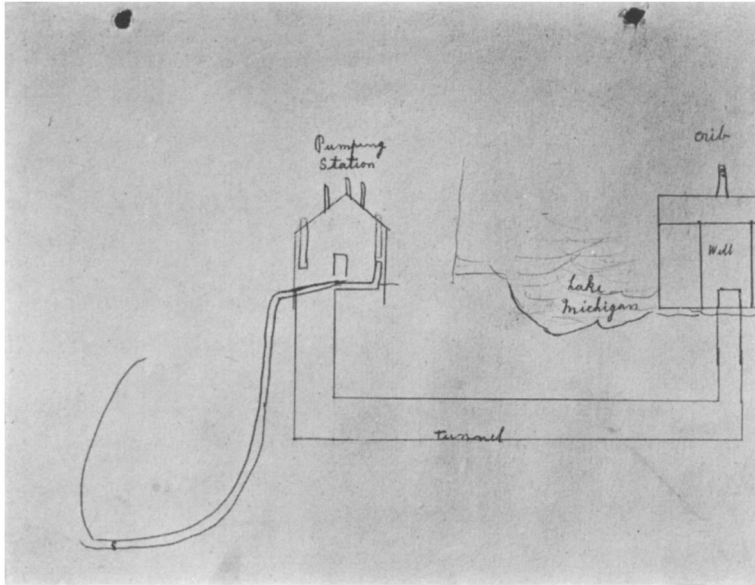
Such questions as how Chicago gets its water supply; how the



CHILD'S DIAGRAM OF FREIGHT SUBWAY

city takes care of the health of its people; how Chicago protects people against fire, all became topics of conversation. Many topics were suggested by the children. However, after the food supply of Chicago had been discussed, the question of how Chicago gets its water supply, and how Chicago protects its people against fire were selected for further study. Many reasons could be given for the selection of these two questions. Both the water system and the fire department contained the human and dramatic element as the evolution from the days of Fort Dearborn were traced, abundant material was available, and the appeal of the fire engine is still strong to the third-grade child.

The problem of the water supply had its beginning within the child's experience. How is water brought into your own home, became the question. The water was traced underground through the streets of Chicago to the pumping-station. Many children knew of pumping-stations near their homes. How many stations were needed to supply the water for the city? Where to find this information was the next problem. Some suggested asking at home; others, going to a pumping-station, but at last the telephone directory was accepted as authority, and the question of the number was solved. But numbers meant



CHILD'S DIAGRAM OF CRIB AND PUMPING STATION

little unless it could be found how much water one pumping-station supplied. This was answered when one girl brought in the following written report to the class, after a visit to a pumping-station in her neighborhood:

THE LAKE VIEW PUMPING-STATION

I went to the Lake View pumping-station this afternoon. There were four pumping-engines. On Sundays they have two engines going because people do not use as much water on Sundays as they do on week-days.

I asked the man how much water they would pump today, and he said, "Fifty million gallons."

One engine would pump twenty-five million gallons a day, so on week-days the four engines pump one hundred million gallons of water.

Elizabeth G.

The construction of the water-cribs in Lake Michigan was next discussed; information was brought in from every source; old histories were collected at home; children sought information from parents and friends, and during the reading period, Miss Hall's "Story of Chicago" was read, discussed, and parts of it dramatized, until finally, to use the words of an observer who had watched the work as it progressed:

"Those children knew more than I ever expect to learn about the settling of the city, the growth of its streets, the drainage, the water-supply, etc. Not only did they know it, but it was vital to them. One boy voluntarily spent a large part of a morning making comparative maps of old and "now-a-days" Chicago, as he termed it, and another was so possessed with the idea and image of Fort Dearborn that he drew or chalked or painted it on everything he did."

Much more space could be taken in showing the further development of the problems set. The children were constantly gathering information, and valuable information always awakens a desire to impart it to some one. One of the children suggested having the parents come to school some day so that all these interesting things about Chicago might be told to them. The idea grew, and at last plans began to be made for a Pioneer Party to be given to the parents. Mrs. Alice Putnam, the kindergartner, had made Chicago her home since the days of Fort Dearborn, and the children were highly delighted to invite her as a guest of honor.

From the day the pioneer party was suggested all was excitement. The whole grade became a cluster of committees. One of these planned the invitations, which read as follows:

Dear Mother and Father:—

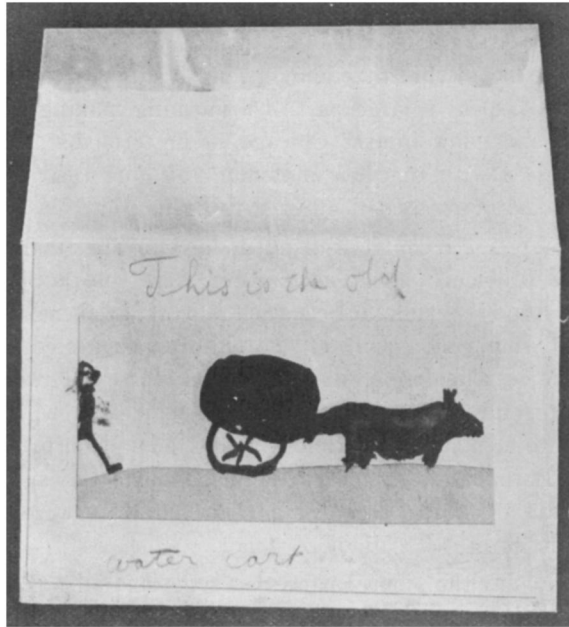
Tuesday afternoon, May 5, at 2:30 o'clock we are going to have a Pioneer Party. We want both of you to come. If you know something that happened in Chicago a long time ago, will you tell us about it?

Olga B.

The invitations were written, folded and then decorated with scenes from "Early Chicago." The envelopes were addressed, stamped, and each child had the joy of sending his own through the mail.

A program committee labored over the selection of material worthy to be given at the party. The members finally decided that each child should select some phase of the subject, such as Chicago's water supply, the early settlement of the city, the fire department, and should write out his material at home. The English period was used for a discussion of these papers. Three of the best, after much criticism, were given place on the program.

The refreshment committee after much deliberation decided to waive appropriate refreshments in the form of johnny-cake, and serve lemonade and cup-cakes. Another group of children folded and decorated the paper napkins with appropriate pioneer pictures.



INVITATION DECORATED WITH EARLY CHICAGO SCENE

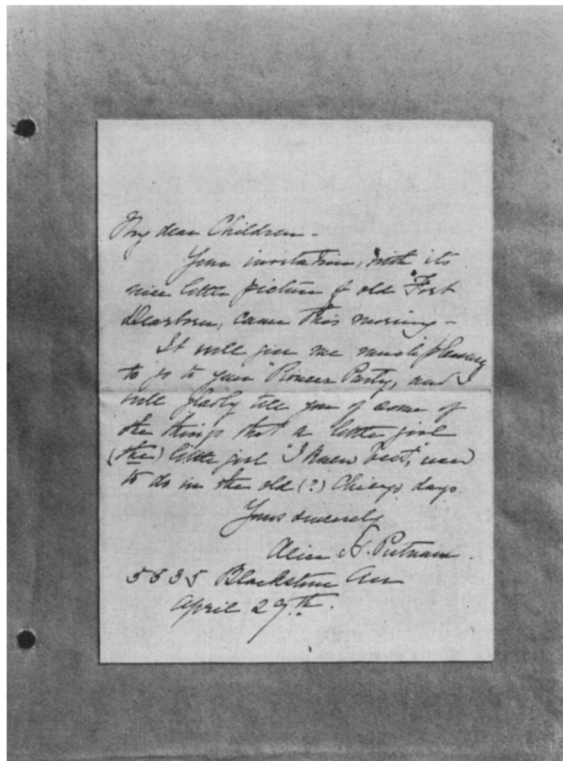
The first real thrill came when Mrs. Putnam's acceptance of the invitation arrived. The children had asked the parents to tell interesting things about Chicago, and several came with pictures and rare old books, ready to tell of personal experiences.

On the eventful day all was in charge of the committees. Each child had some task to perform, and each felt such responsibility that he well knew the party would be a failure without his coöperation. That each child fitted into the scheme was evident when the refreshment committee returned from the domestic science kitchen and said, "Mrs. Webster says she always wants Robert to help, for he can squeeze lemons so that all the juice is saved." Robert's face beamed, for up to this time his part in the scheme had been doubtful. Now he had found his place.

The details of the party are best told in the accounts written by the children. The charades played were thoroughly enjoyed by both parents and children, as is evident from the following accounts given by two of the boys:

On Tuesday, May 5, our grade gave a pioneer party. We had many things to do, but I am going to tell you about the charades we gave. We played five charades, Illinois, cabin, pioneer, Indian and Dearborn.

To play Illinois we had an ill person and a father. The father called a doctor for the ill boy. He came and gave the ill boy some medicine, then went away. Some boys then came and said, "Get up! It is time for school." But the ill boy said, "Don't annoy me, don't annoy me," and the father sent the boys away.



MRS. PUTNAM'S ACCEPTANCE

To play cabin, we had two horses hitched to a chair for a cab. Richard and James were the horses. The driver drove to a lady's house. Judy was the lady. She had called for him to come. The driver said, "Step in, step in," and the lady said, "I am in the cab."

Our parents could guess all the charades.

William C.

Tuesday, May 5, the third grade had a pioneer party. We acted out three charades, Illinois, cabin and Dearborn. Besides we had two puzzles.

We had an ear of corn with a pie made out of paper. The ear of corn was sticking through the pie, and the puzzle was pioneer. On the blackboard we had a big D cut out of white paper, with the word *an* written inside of it. The answer to this puzzle was Indian.

Robert H.

The awe, wonder and enjoyment that shone in the faces of the children as Mrs. Putnam told of childhood experiences in the old city of Chicago and around Fort Dearborn, was a fitting climax to the work each child had done in preparation for the event. Later, in writing an account of the party for the school paper, one boy made manifest the spirit that had animated the entire group all through the work. The boy had himself drawn the map of Chicago; and yet note the impersonal way in which he refers to his work:

THE THIRD GRADE PIONEER PARTY

The third grade had a pioneer party on Tuesday, May 5th. They had a lot of things there. One boy drew a map of early Chicago and one of now-a-days Chicago and explained them to the parents. Stephen wrote a paper on Early Chicago. He read it. This is his paper:

Early Chicago

"In the early time, Chicago was only a swamp, with a few Indian tents around the river. Trappers from Canada trapped the woods for fur. They trapped beaver, minks, fox and marten. These they traded to the Indians and made their living. The trappers were French. Shiploads of fur went back to France every year.

"Soon the English came and carried back the wonderful stories of Chicago. Some of them stayed and built houses and lived here. A young man and his wife who had lived in Detroit for some years came down on pack-horses, his daughter first, his wife second, and he came last. They trailed the woods for many miles. When he got here he bought a cabin. His wife and daughter set to work scrubbing the floors. He set up his bench in the corner of the room and began to make furniture for his house, for he had not been able to carry much with him.

"One day the Indians came to see their new friend, John Kinzie. He took them in and began to work with his silver, for he had learned to do it when he was a boy.

"It was a cold winter. In the spring they set to work building the fort. It was soon finished. It was all whitewashed. Some of the soldiers came by water and some by land. Then John Kinzie made a little veranda, and when Mrs. Kinzie sat on the veranda and looked across the river at the neatly whitewashed fort, she thought it was a protection.

"Soon a ship came into the mouth of the river, and everybody ran to see it. 'That ship must be bringing us help if we need it,' the people thought. But they were mistaken. Those men on board had a sickness, and they had

come to get well. The people outside were not permitted to go near the fort, but the soldiers were soon well, and everyone was glad.

"People along the river were taking up more land, and the Indians were almost crowded out. They did not like this and thought they would make war, so one day they attacked the white people. Everyone ran to the fort, and the people were kept in there for three months.

"One day news came that Black Hawk, the great chief, was captured, and this ended the trouble.

"Stephen R."

Elinor read her paper on Chicago's water-system. The boys and girls played charades and served refreshments. Warren told riddles about early Chicago. Just as each child was going to do his part, Alexis told what that child was to do.

Mrs. Putnam, our guest of honor, told many stories of what happened to her when she was a little girl in early Chicago. This is one of the stories:

When I was a little girl, Chicago was supplied with water from a water-cart. It was driven by a very big man. One day he asked me if I wanted to ride on the water-cart. I said, "Yes, I did," so he lifted me on the top of the cart, and I rode around the block.

This is another story she told:

The commander of the Fort Dearborn army had a little girl about my age. I used to visit her. There were some rusty cannon-balls in the fort that were never used. We made gardens and houses all of cannon-balls in Fort Dearborn. We had to put them back, but that was a part of our play.

This is the third story she told:

In the time of early Chicago there were no bridges. People used ferries. These ferries were strong ropes fastened at each river-bank. There was a little car running across on the ropes. One day the ferryman said to me, "Do you want to draw me across?" I said, "Yes." It took a long-time to draw him across, he was so heavy, but at last I did it.

To the adult observer the pioneer party might have been a crude outcome; to the child who had a part in its achievement, it was perfection. The idea was to encourage self-expression, to foster independence, and to set a community or coöperative project so large that each child might have a share in it; to develop a sense of responsibility through a division of labor, for the child realized that his failure to perform some task assigned to him brought disaster to the pleasure of the entire group; whereas in a series of duplicate undertakings without the coöperative enterprise the child's failure affects himself alone.